

How Lattie Tipton Got His Distinguished Service Cross

By MD Marks

IN July of 1966, *The New York Herald Tribune* carried a story titled, “Why I Gave My Medals Away”. Audie Murphy was credited with authoring that article. The article was the result of a question asked by Mrs. Joanne Gerhard, the wife of a World War II veteran and Wichita professor.

In the article Audie stated, “I gave away my medals at the end of the war because I never felt that they entirely belonged to me. My whole unit earned them, but I didn’t know how to give them to the whole unit.”

On an earlier occasion during 1947 in an unpublished Life Magazine photo¹, Wanda Hendrix holds her soon-to-be husband’s Medal of Honor. Audie’s other medals, still in their holders, are scattered about on the floor next to them. Wanda’s gaze on her husband and the gentle manner she cradles the medal in her open hand, suggests respectful concern while Audie’s tense body posture and his closed left hand may be communicating a different one for him.

In a letter to Lillian Bailey dated July 19, 1981, David “Spec” McClure offers some insight into just what did happen to Audie’s original medals.

“I am enclosing a copy of the article ‘Why I Gave My Medals Away.’ It appeared in *The New York Herald Tribune* in July 1955. The article sounds just about the way Audie thought and talked. Actually, he did not give all of his medals away—although he might have thought he had.”

In the earlier Life Magazine article, Audie made this comment on medals. “War is a nasty business, to be avoided if possible, and to be gotten over with as soon as possible. It’s not the sort of job that deserves medals.”

During his post war life, Audie was asked again and again to pose for some photographer or another with his medals. The Army was constantly having to replace them because the last set seemed to disappear. But what of

¹The photo is unpublished but from a series printed in the November 17, 1947 issue of Life Magazine, pp106, 108, and 111. The photographer is not identified but maybe Allan Grant based on the style. Mr. Grant was a well-known Life Magazine photographer at the time.

the originals, those seen in the Life photo and the Medal of Honor so lovingly held by Wanda Hendrix, what happened to them?

Spec continues with his explanation in his letter:

“When he and Wanda were married, they lived in a duplex. The medals were stored in a box



Audie shows girlfriend military awards. Similar to a series of other photos which appeared in the November 17, 1947 issue of Life Magazine (pp.106, 108, and 111) Audie shows his military decorations to his soon-to-be-bride Wanda Hendrix. This photo was not published. This photo was probably acquired on request from Life Magazine by the late Lillian Bailey, a former Audie Murphy Fan club president.

Photo source: from the collection of Lillian Bailey

in the garage. After that marriage broke up, both he and Wanda moved away and left the medals. The son of the woman who owned the duplex found the medals in the garage and kept them. After Audie's death, he brought them to either me or Pam—I forgot which, but they were intended for Pam.

“All of the major medals were there with the exception of the Distinguished Service Cross --- usually called the DSC. This is the second highest medal the Army gives for extraordinary heroism in actual combat. In the action for which Audie won his DSC, his best friend, Lattie Tipton, was killed. Tipton and Audie had made a wild charge against a German strong point. They had taken their first objective—an enemy machine gun—when a sniper killed Tipton.

“Audie always resented the fact that Tipton was awarded no medal for his part in the action, and he promised in an interview that he was going to give his own DSC to Claudean Tipton - Lattie Tipton's young daughter. So, when we did not find the DSC among the original medals, I thought he had sent it to Claudean. Pam gave the rest of the original medals to the VA Hospital in San Antonio.

“[Carl] Swickerath located Claudean, who was living in South Carolina. I had met her when she was out here for a "This Is Your Life" radio show about Audie in 1949. So, after Swickerath located her, I called her. She said that she had read in the newspapers that Audie had promised to give her his DSC, but she had never received it.

“I thought that it might have been lost in the mail. Then a strange—almost spooky—thing happened. The Memorial Museum Room in San Antonio did not have room for all the items I had sent it, so after the room was opened, the surplus items were sent back to me. Among those items was that missing DSC. I was almost shocked. It was as if Audie were speaking from the grave and telling me to do something that he had neglected to do in his lifetime.

“I told Pam the story behind the DSC and she asked me to send the medal to Claudean. I did. I also wrote the biggest [news]paper nearest the town in which Claudean lived. The newspaper did as I thought it would. It sent out a reporter and a photographer to interview Claudean. So more than thirty years after he was killed, Lattie Tipton finally got

the credit that Audie always wanted him to have.”

The story of how the medals found their way back to the Murphy family was verified by family friend, Terri Eddlemon Prim, in a recent interview with the AMRF. Ms. Prim related a story that Terry Murphy told her about Audie's medals. Terry Murphy told Ms. Prim that shortly after his father's passing, a man came to the door of the Murphy home. Terry answered it and the man handed him a box. He said, “Here, these belong to you” and walked away.

Through Audie's point of view, he did give his medals away. They were never “his” from the beginning. Perhaps Audie's closing words in the *Tribune* article best relates his feelings.

“That's why—because of my own feelings at certain times—I didn't feel comfortable with my medals. I am grateful to the Army for giving them to me. But I feel today, some 10 years later, just as I did when I received them: that they rightfully belong to Company B, 15th Infantry Regiment, Third Division.”

... MD Marks



Photo courtesy of Claudean Tipton Carpenter